

*Washington, DC* - In response to an amendment sponsored by Congressman Michael A. Arcuri (D-NY) and supported by Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman John Hall (D-NY), the non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) today released a report highlighting potential disadvantages of building new High-Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) power lines along certain transportation rights-of-way.

"This independent GAO report further demonstrates that NYRI's plan to construct a 190-mile long high voltage power line through Upstate New York is a bad idea environmentally, economically, as well as for the region's security even when sited along existing transportation rights-of-way," said Hinchey. "New York certainly has its energy needs, but constructing another power line is a 20th century solution for a 21st century problem. Instead of more power lines, we should be investing heavily in alternative sources of energy, particularly solar, which can more effectively satisfy our state's energy needs while sparing us all of the many detrimental impacts associated with a power line."

Arcuri said, "Today's report is vindication for families, businesses, and local government who have stood up to NYRI's attempts to run roughshod over local communities. For the first time, an outside, non-partisan source has found that siting new transmission lines, such as the one proposed by NYRI, may raise energy prices where the line starts, reduce property values and stunt alternative energy initiatives and energy conservation."

GAO's report, "Transmission Lines: Issues Associated with High-Voltage, Direct Current Transmission Lines along Transportation Rights-of-Way," evaluates the safety and security of placing HVDC electric transmission power lines along active railroad, highway and natural gas pipeline rights-of-way.

Highlights from the report include the following findings:

Potential disadvantages of building new transmission lines include:

- May diminish the economic or aesthetic value

- May raise electricity prices in areas where electricity is being taken
- May reduce incentives to identify alternatives that decrease demand (e.g. energy conservation)

Potential Security and Safety risks include:

- Accidents from transportation infrastructure users (such as train derailments or highway crashes) could damage transmission lines and fallen transmission lines could damage transportation infrastructure.

“The study released today provides even more evidence that NYRI’s plan to build a massive power line along New York’s railways is a bad idea, plain and simple,” said Hall. “Not only would the colossal, 200 mile long power line steamroll land owners and threaten sensitive environmental areas, but the report shows that this route would create a major risk for serious accidents that could threaten public safety. The more NYRI is studied, the more obvious it becomes that it shouldn’t go forward.”

While the report does not find any preference for collocating power lines along one type of transportation right-of-way (rail, highway, etc.) over another, New York’s aging rail infrastructure has resulted in a high number of derailments recently. A CSX freight train derailed in Oneida on March 12, 2007 resulting in an explosion and the evacuation of a one-mile radius. A second CSX freight train derailment occurred in Canastota on January 23, 2008.

Using his position on the influential House Rules committee, Arcuri was able to attach an amendment requiring an assessment of the safety and security vulnerabilities of placing HVDC transmission lines along active railroad rights-of-way, to the Rail and Public Transportation Security Act, H.R. 1401, which passed the House in March, 2007. Language requiring GAO to conduct the assessment was included in the bill enacting the 9/11 Commission recommendations and signed into law on August 3, 2007.

A copy of the GAO's report may be found at <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-08-347R>.